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## **High profile could help Jody Wilson-Raybould keep her seat away from Liberals**

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### **Body**

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OTTAWA - There had been a few names floating around when the Liberals were seeking a candidate for the newly created riding of Vancouver Granville in the last federal election, but it soon became clear the party brass had only one person in mind.

That was Jody Wilson-Raybould, then a B.C. regional chief of the Assembly of First Nations, who quickly became one of the stars Justin Trudeau and his team were promoting heavily in their bid for power.

"They certainly dissuaded anyone else from running," Sam Wyatt, who was on the board of the local Liberal riding association at the time.

"Now they find themselves in a situation where they probably wish they hadn't made that choice."

That same star candidate, who won the seat for the Liberals in 2015 with about 44 per cent of the vote, rocked the Trudeau government early this year with allegations that she had been improperly pressured to end a criminal prosecution against Montreal engineering firm SNC-Lavalin.

The scandal returned to the headlines with a vengeance Wednesday as the federal ethics watchdog issued a report that concluded the prime minister violated the Conflict of Interest Act.

The ongoing saga of SNC-Lavalin, which saw Wilson-Raybould resign from cabinet before being ousted from the Liberal caucus alongside Ontario MP Jane Philpott, had already caused the Liberals to slide in the polls.

Now, the finding by the ethics commissioner threatens to further derail the Liberal campaign, both nationally and, perhaps, in Vancouver Granville, where the Liberals are gearing up for a fight against someone they once called their own.

The former justice minister is now an Independent candidate, and political observers say her prominence and history in the riding give her a greater chance at victory than is usually the case for those running without a political party machine.

"It's going to be crazy," said Mario Canseco, president of Vancouver polling firm Research Co.

Taleeb Noormohamed, a 42-year-old tech entrepreneur, was acclaimed Tuesday as the Liberal candidate vying to unseat her. The New Democrats, who placed second with about 27 per cent of the vote in 2015, chose **climate activist** Yvonne Hanson as their candidate.

## High profile could help Jody Wilson-Raybould keep her seat away from Liberals

The Conservatives, who were close behind with about 26 per cent of the vote, are running Zach Segal, a former political staffer in Ottawa.

The impact the SNC-Lavalin affair will have on the final result remains to be seen, but Lesli Boldt, a long-time observer of B.C. politics, said it is clear that Wilson-Raybould earned a lot of local support from those who view her as a principled politician, even if they do not agree with her politics.

"She's certainly got a head start ... on some of the other candidates here," said Boldt, president of Vancouver-based Boldt Communications.

Noormohamed was one of those who was dissuaded from seeking the Liberal nomination the last time around.

"I think you do the best that you can for your country when the time is right, and the timing was right this time," said Noormohamed, who also ran unsuccessfully for the Liberals in North Vancouver in 2011.

Noormohamed said he wants to focus on housing affordability, transportation, climate change and health care, and that the Liberals helping him campaign are also uninterested in rehashing the SNC-Lavalin affair.

"What happened in the past, these types of questions that will be interesting to debate and discuss are not the questions that are going to move the country forward," he said. "I think that's the priority."

Claire Marshall, who is part of the campaign committee organizing for Wilson-Raybould, also said she does not expect SNC-Lavalin to be a major focus, but said the people she meets at the doorstep do recognize her and express their admiration for what she did.

"They're not specifically talking about the SNC-Lavalin thing, but they really just talk about how they're really proud of what she's done and how she spoke up," said Marshall, who was the outgoing chair of the Liberal riding association when she left to support Wilson-Raybould.

There are significant barriers facing Independent candidates, including an inability to fundraise before the writs drop.

Candidates in Vancouver Granville are allowed to spend \$106,685 on the election, and Marshall said the Wilson-Raybould campaign hopes to be able to raise enough funds to meet that target. Registered parties, meanwhile, can spend an additional \$84,823 in the riding and have money in the bank.

Canseco said another factor that could work against Wilson-Raybould is how close things get at the national level, as strategic voting could come into play if those sympathetic to Wilson-Raybould are worried the Conservatives could form government.

Marshall, who remains a Liberal, said she wished the party had decided to sit this one out.

"Obviously that would make our lives easier," she said.

David Gruber, chair of the Liberal riding association, said there was never a chance of that happening.

"I think there's been an energy in the activist base of Liberals in Vancouver Granville since the spring that reflects a desire of people to see a Liberal representing us," he said.

Wyatt said he too is a Liberal, but plans to vote for Wilson-Raybould this year.

"I think the party is bigger than any given government in the long run."

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High profile could help Jody Wilson-Raybould keep her seat away from Liberals

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